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PINS, IS

THE BLACK HEBREWS OF DIMONA

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EXC

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The Israeli press has reported in recent days stories of tension between the Black Hebrews and other local residents of Dimona. Moreover, as reported in reftel the Government is now looking for 23 recent arrivals, whose tourist visas have expired and against whom deportation orders have been issued. The Department may be interested in the enclosed article appearing in Haaretz of January 5, which gives a somewhat different, more benign account of relations between the "Black Hebrews" and the rest of the community in Dimona.

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DUNNIGAN

Enclosure: "Dimona 'Blacks' Face Integration Problems"

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DIMONA "BLACKS" FACE INTEGRATION PROBLEMS

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Justice, the Interior and the Police received last week identical letters signed by the Mayor of Dimona and his deputy, the Secretary of the Workers' Council, and the local Rabbi. The letters said that recently great tensions had become evident between the local inhabitants and the "Blacks." The local residents of the quarters where the Blacks are living reportedly "have reached the end of their tether and were leaving the neighborhood and Dimona."

Room shelters had been seized by the Blacks for use as workshops and for use by a variety of orchestras. The social situation in Dimona is near explosion as a result of overcrowding. The Blacks now rent flats in other neighborhoods and there are cases of 30 people living in a 64sq. flat, thus destroying the regular and orderly way of neighborhood life." The letter ends by saying that the situation cannot go on and that the Government of Israel is regarded as directly responsible for the present state of affairs arising from the illegal presence of these people.

A visit to Dimona and talks with functionaries and inhabitants of the town contradict and refute the charges contained in the letters to the four ministers. Doubtlessly the Mayor's announcement that he will not run for the next election and local competition for his job lie behind the letters.

When the Black immigrants arrived claiming to be descendants of the ancient Hebrews, they received a warm welcome and the Dimona Rotary Club adopted them. The immigration officials who did not quite know how to deal with them gave them special immigrant cards and placed at their disposal ten flats in a new Dimona neighborhood clamoring for settlers. The men found work in local factories and their beautiful wives worked as secretaries. Their children were admitted to the local elementary school. All seemed to go well until Purim when the children of the Black newcomers were forbidden to attend a school party. Their parents explained that, like Hannukkah, Purim was not mentioned in the Bible and thus not a divinely sanctioned feast. Fights broke out between children and shouts of "dirty niggers"

were heard. A quarrel among the parents of the two groups led to a break between the Black Sect and its neighbors. When another dozen families arrived a few months later, they were housed in the same block of houses, but their social integration became more difficult. The Rotary Club ignored them and their children were sent to a Youth Center. The Sect continued to proclaim its origin from the ten tribes and to insist that Israel is, in fact, its land. They realized later on that their statements had turned them and had caused the Ministry of the Interior to stop other groups from coming into the country. The Sect defied these restrictions and members continued to arrive as tourists who were absorbed by their local compatriots in their small apartments. As the years went by they founded a superior Jazz band which is touring the country and helping to support the entire Sect. Though their exact number is unknown, they number a few hundred. They are industrious and about the only Israelis who are not involved in the mad race for prestige and money. They do not complain about their miserable conditions and social ostracism, lack of school and housing. They are sober, peaceful, well-mannered, courteous and disciplined, always the first to volunteer for public service. There is no near-explosive tension in the air. This is only the beginning of a struggle for administrative leadership of Dimona. In a municipal election campaign all is fair, and that goes for writing letters to ministers and creating artificial tensions.